

Migden storms Capitol

by Cynthia Laird

State Senator Carole Migden (D-San Francisco) was sworn into office Monday, December 6 and named chair of the Appropriations Committee by Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata (D-Oakland). All Senate bills that have a financial component will come before her committee, making her one of the most powerful legislators in Sacramento.



Carole Migden

Migden, an out lesbian and former assemblywoman, chaired the powerful Assembly Appropriations Committee several years ago.

"Anyone who observed Carole Migden's great success as chair of the Assembly Appropriations Committee knows she will do an outstanding job in the Senate as well," Perata said in a

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statement.

With the state facing a \$6.7 billion budget deficit, Migden told the *Bay Area Reporter* in an interview December 3 that she's going to focus on coming up with new initiatives and new sources of funding for programs.

"We need to find ways to come up with new initiatives," she said. "I don't just want to demand new approaches, but find ways to subsidize them."

As an example she pointed to health insurance for children that could be funded with federal dollars.

She also said that she was honored to be appropriations chair and noted that her new position, along with Perata's leadership post as Senate president, helps keep some of the political power in Northern California. In contrast to the state Senate, Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez (D) represents Los Angeles.

"I am ready to meet the economic challenges that our state faces," she said. "I look forward to returning to the Legislature and working closely with members on both sides of the aisle and the governor to give California the fiscal attention it deserves."

Migden, who until Monday served as chairwoman of the state Board of Equalization, served in the Assembly in the 1990s. She's the author of California's original domestic partnership law, and has pushed legislation funding HIV/AIDS research and other issues. Prior to that she served as a San Francisco supervisor.

"Typically, I take hard bills that no one else wants and fashion a

interview 12/8
put your return



The new LGBT Legislative Caucus, from left, Assemblyman John Laird, Assemblywoman Jackie Goldberg, state Senator Christine Kehoe, state Senator Carole Migden, Assemblyman Mark Leno, and state Senator Sheila Kuehl.

solution," she said.

In the state Senate, Migden hopes to work on legislation involving breast cancer; Marin County, parts of which she now represents, has some of the highest breast cancer rates in the nation. She said she also hopes to work on various environmental issues, such as sudden oak death, which affects her district.

And Migden's not shying away from LGBT issues.

"A pivotal focus will be lesbian and gay equality issues," she said.

But part of that work, as Migden sees it, involves building bridges with the Latino community. She envisions an eight-year plan over two terms in the Senate that will increasingly connect the issues facing the LGBT community to that of the state's fast growing Latino electorate.

"New voters in California are the foundation of the next generation," she said. "A coalitional al-

liance is what we ought to have for mutual benefit."

"A bridge can be made," she added, mentioning such matters as civil marriage equality for the LGBT community and driver licenses for immigrants.

"A church wedding is something else," she said.

Efforts to address both those issues faltered in the last legislative session and likely will be debated again when the Legislature reconvenes in January. State Senator Gilbert Cedillo (D-Los Angeles) plans to reintroduce his driver license bill, and Assemblyman Mark Leno (D-San Francisco) on Monday reintroduced his civil marriage bill.

"Marriage licenses and drivers licenses are civil rights," Migden said.

In other changes in the new Legislature, Assemblyman John Laird (D-Santa Cruz) is the new chair of the powerful Assembly

Budget Committee. Laird told the *B.A.R.* Tuesday that budget hearings would get under way following Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's

unveiling of his budget January 10.

"My real priority is to put the state on a pay-as-you-go basis," Laird said. "But within that, over the last two years I've fought very hard to protect the AIDS Drug Assistance Program and I'm going to use my position to be very watchful of it."

While Laird hopes the state budget can be passed on time later next year, he said, "it's more important to have a budget that takes care of people and invests in California."

Additionally, state Senator Sheila Kuehl (D-Santa Monica) took over as chair of the LGBT Legislative Caucus, which now has six members: Kuehl, Migden, Laird, Leno, Assemblywoman Jackie Goldberg (D-Los Angeles), and state Senator Christine Kehoe (D-San Diego). At a reception attended by about 200 people Monday evening, Laird said the caucus is now at a "high water mark" with six members. ▼